Repair: Materials, Techniques, Communities
Second-hand Challenges Workshop Series

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Repair: Materials, Techniques, Communities – Workshop Report 2
Second-hand Challenges Workshop Series
Workshop 2 — 25ᵗʰ March 2022

The second-hand challenges workshop series brought together researchers and practitioners working in second-hand to problem-solve together around key challenges in the second-hand economy: waste and reuse, repair, labour, and community welfare.

1. Introduction – Why this challenge?

Repair has a crucial role to play in the creation of a circular economy, which addresses the problems of overconsumption and waste. Alongside reuse, repair is one of the shortest 'loops' in a circular economy, without the transport and emissions associated with recycling. Because of this there has been legislative interest in repair in recent years, seeking to build repairability into goods at the design or manufacture stages and encourage repair in use. As well as its environmental impact, the social function and benefit of repair has also generated interest. Repair groups offer occasions to build social connection among attendees and create community cohesions and learning new skills or completing repair work on an individual basis boosts wellbeing and feelings of empowerment. Repair also has a significant relationship with the second-hand economy, whereby second-hand goods can be mended or remade for a new consumer, second-hand labour is used to regenerate stock and second-hand stock is used by repair groups to fulfil community needs, both practical and social.

With all this in mind, this workshop brings together speakers with experience and expertise in a range of repair contexts, including professional repair, repair workshops and community repair schemes, the history of repair, and contemporary repair policy and research. We explore the challenges associated with accessing, practicing and legislating repair, building communities of repair, and fostering a greater culture of repair, before considering possible solutions that participants might action in their own repair work or lives.

2. Defining the challenge - Programme of speakers

- **Maya Wassell Smith**, Cardiff University

  Maya is an AHRC-funded PhD student researching the craft practice and communities on board ships in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. She spoke about the repair practices of 19ᵗʰ century sailors and how understanding repair systems of the past can add to discussion of repair in the present, and shape conversations about repair in the

future.
https://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue142/smith.html

- **Claire Beadnell**, Sustainable Textiles Southsea

  Claire is a former occupational therapist and has been running free sewing classes in Portsmouth for 3 years, in community spaces such as libraries and church hall. Participants can learn repair/upcycling/alterations skills for textiles (both hand and machine sewing), practicing on their own clothes and those from charity shops, or complete "make and take" projects, designed by Claire.
  https://greenpompey.org.uk/shades-of-green/2019/10/11/how-to-fix-your-stuff-in-portsmouth/

- **Alex Reed**, The Easton Cobbler

  Alex is a shoe-maker, designer and repairer. Having previously trained and worked in both bespoke shoemaking and high-end but mass-produced shoe design, he developed a discomfort with unsustainable production models and toxic materials. He undertook a residency at the Autodesk studio, Pier 9, working up designs for modular shoes which it is possible to produce in less polluting ways (using 3d printing and recyclable materials, not glue) and easy to repair. He now works as a cobbler.
  Instagram @AlexReedShoes

- **Phoebe Brown**, Repair Café Wales

  Repair Café Wales run pop-up community events for members of public to bring in items for repair by volunteers, and have just opened the first high street repair café in Wales, in Newport. The cafés repair a wide range of goods, from household appliances, to clothing and toys and their aims include skill development, waste reduction and community cohesion.
  https://repaircafewales.org/

- **Helen O'Sullivan**, SustFashWales

  Helen is a teacher, campaigner and PhD student at University of Portsmouth, researching sustainable design education at primary school level. Her research addresses the paucity of sustainability and repair-focussed content in the curriculum. She spoke about one of the making tasks she has developed and used in the classroom – a toy-making project which teaches repair/making skills such as running stitch, button, slip stitch, applique/patching, dyeing and printing – which will equip students with the skills equipment which they will use beyond school.
  https://sustfashwales.org/about/

- **Tamara Kneese,** Intel

  Tamara spoke about her previous academic research projects on tech refurbishes and repairers. One case study was a non-profit which refurbishes laptops and electronic equipment, ensuring old tech does not go to landfill and is refurbished for the use of marginalised, and low-income communities. The second looked at a project at a games console museum, which encouraged young people to disassemble, assemble and play with the code of old machines.
  https://www.tamarakneese.com/

- **Danielle Purkiss,** UCL

  Danielle works on the UKRI-funded Big Repair Project and Big Compost Project, which harness "citizen science" to gather data from the public on how and what their repair habits and capabilities are, in order to engage with and influence UK repair policy and legislation. She shared some of the findings of their crowd-sourced research and spoke the limitations of the 2021 'Right to Repair' policy.
  https://www.bigrepairproject.org.uk/

3. Themes in the discussion

- **Resourcing repair or the teaching of repair (time, funding, teachers, materials)**
  - How can repair classes fund themselves, gather material resources for repair and "pay" teachers/helpers? Many organisations relied on volunteer labour to operate and fund themselves/reimbursed staff through selling higher value refurbishments; finding materials often entails trawling the second-hand market (creating extra work).
  - Where can supported repair/classes take place, which reflects funding/accessibility challenges? At present these are largely existing community/non profit spaces which are themselves under-resourced.
  - How can repair be made more financially appealing, when repair can often cost more than a new item? Can taxation (VAT) and legislation play a part?
  - Whose responsibility is it to resource consumer repairs? What role do manufacturers play in providing spare parts and how should this be costed or capped?
  - How can professional repairers be financially supported? Can VAT and professional indemnity be part of this?

- **Skill**
  - Consumers/people have a range of skills and differing levels of comfort in repairing their goods and extending the lives of their objects. Repair culture/policy needs to reflect this, with support for people attempting repair themselves, accessible professional/repairers, or learning spaces.

o How and where can people learn repair skills – in education (built into curriculum) and at an early age, face to face/in the community, online/via QR code.

o Teaching repair requires skills and knowledge other than those of the material repair. This includes making sure teaching is age appropriate, adapting tasks to learners with particular needs.

- **Social and wellbeing benefits of repair**
    o Repair is empowering for individual practitioners or consumers, "it makes you feel good".

    o Co-fixing or practicing/learning repair with others has cohesive effects and engenders positive interactions between people. It can change the dynamic of a group or space, e.g "calmer classrooms".

    o "Sewcial"/reparative aspect of repair can benefit vulnerable groups/people, e.g refugees, those experiencing mental health issues.

    o Social media can be useful in helping people celebrate their repair projects, but putting such interactions and repairers online comes with associated drawbacks, particularly if they are vulnerable.

    o How can the social value of repair be communicated and used as a motivation in establishing a culture of repair?

- **Cultures of repair**
    o A shift is needed to encourage consumers/people to "think about repair as an option" rather than replacing/buying new.

    o Repair can be a way of extending the lives of objects people already own, but also an enhanced way of consuming, i.e buying things on the second-hand market with a view to repair/alter/refurbish or intentionally buying new products that can be repaired easily.

    o How can repair ideologies which apply to particular categories of goods thought of as worthy of repair be broadened to those that aren't (i.e cars to clothing; washing machines to kettles; technology to shoes)?

    o How, when and where can this reorientation take place (e.g school, HE, media, policy)?

    o How can people's expectations of a repaired object be brought in line with the realities/practicalities of repair (i.e won't operate/use same software/look the same as a new version)?

    o Whose responsibility is repair of household goods – Renters? Landlords? Manufacturers? Different repairers – professional/high street, manufacturer themselves.

    o How can attitudes toward cost be shifted to assign value to repair/reuse/sustainability, repair labour, intrinsic materials, over cost of a new object?

    o How can repair be more gender inclusive, disregarding historic associations between different repair practices and men/women and making repair relevant to everyone?

o What are health and safety concerns of repaired objects – are they more dangerous?

- **Covid**
    o Pandemic had a significant effect on people's relationships of use of and access to objects and services. This necessitated new skills, goods and patterns of social interaction (many of which involved repair).
    o Repair groups/classes/cafes noticed an uptick in attendance after lockdowns. Repair provided a means of re-socialising following social isolation of the pandemic and in school making classes provided easy social environment to reintegrate.
    o With previous means of access cut off, people needed to acquire new things to access services (i.e closed libraries meant people needed other means of accessing internet, school children learning at home needed laptops to participate), but with limited means repaired goods had a significant role to play.

- **Made to repair**
    o How can objects be better made use of to facilitate consumer/professional repair? E.g In shoe design/manufacture, the use of plastic soles make repair very difficult. In community repair events a significant proportion of electrical objects are found not to open, or replacement parts not available, making repair impossible.
    o What is the designer/manufacturer responsibility in changes to design and composition and making replacement parts available? How can "Right to Repair" legislation be augmented to compel them to implement these changes?

4. Ideas responding to the challenge… How might we create cultures and systems of repair?

- **Resourcing Repair**
    o Manufacturer/supplier to provide out "repair pack"/"repair contract" parts, tools and instructions on request.
    o 3D Printer Network.
    o Reduced working hours and affordable housing to allow more time/space for repair/sustainable practices.
    o Centralised website/"repair index" listing repair resources, practitioners, classes, workshops in any area.
    o Council-run repair "libraries" in every town.
    o Covid grants/funding could be used to fund repair spaces/initiatives.
    o Repair services entitled to free advertising on TV.
    o Intervention team at the tip/recycling centre to provide into about repair/groups.

- o Repair collection box provided by local authorities (like recycling collection).
- o Remove VAT on repair.
- o Connect repair cafes to university infrastructure.
- o Repair shops on the high street.

- **Skill**
  - o Repair to be part of National Curriculum.
  - o Afterschool repair club.
  - o Afterwork repair clubs.
  - o Mobile repair shops.
  - o Local skill swaps.
  - o Toy hacking.
  - o Digital spaces which can be used to share good repair practice.
  - o Repair tv shows.
  - o Government subsidies for repair skills and training.
  - o Brownies and Scouts to learn repair skills (soldering, sewing, woodwork, electronics).

- **Social Repair**
  - o Community "clothes-care" days – mending/fibre identification.
  - o Use existing social/professional/educational networks for repair groups.
  - o Community furniture/upcycling workshops.
  - o Link with university societies for repair activity.

- **Culture of Repair**
  - o Sustainable influencers/ing.
  - o Celebrities sharing promotional repair activities, e.g social media, tv. show.
  - o Ofcom for greenwashing.
  - o Information to be provided with product to ensure longevity/avoid breakages.
  - o Retailers should have repair departments.
  - o Breaking/taking apart sessions for adults and children.
  - o Toy hacking.
  - o Memory tags for garments, which allow the history, memories, stories attached to them to be shared.
  - o Repair exhibitions.
  - o Councils lead by example and repair buildings.
  - o Government to provide 'repair vouchers' which can be spent on materials/labour to disincentivise buying new.
  - o Increase materials awareness in education.
  - o Waste to be made more visible.

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- **Made to Repair**
  - Manufacturers to be held responsible for collection/repair at product end of life.
  - Legislation which prohibits designed obsolescence.
  - Legislation with enforces provision of repair, instructions, parts.
  - Products sold with a repairability rating.
  - 'Open' garments designed and made in a modular way.
  - 'Design-for-Repair' on design education syllabus.
  - "Product passport" to record life and data of a product.